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A Schizophrenic Patient's Response in Art Therapy

to Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist

AN EXHIBIT

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**A SCHIZOPHRENIC PATIENT'S RESPONSE IN ART
— THERAPY TO CHANGES IN THE LIFE
OF THE PSYCHOTHERAPIST**

**Hanna Yaxa Kwiatkowska
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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
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This booklet was originally planned to accompany an exhibit of the same name. The present edition is enlarged to contain copies of the pictures that made up the exhibit, and will have wider distribution.

A SCHIZOPHRENIC PATIENT'S RESPONSE IN ART THERAPY TO CHANGES IN THE LIFE OF THE PSYCHOTHERAPIST

I. Patient:

The patient is a 27 year old single female, diagnosed schizophrenic with catatonic features. She was admitted to the National Institute of Mental Health in January 1955 and except for a brief period in the Spring of 1958 has continued to reside there until the present time.*

The patient's father died in 1957. The mother is living and well. There are three siblings who are also diagnosed as schizophrenic and who have been hospitalized elsewhere.

The patient has received psychotherapy on the average of 4 sessions per week during her hospitalization. No shock therapy or pharmacotherapy has been administered. Art therapy was begun in April, 1958.

II. Method Used:

Spontaneous drawings and paintings by a patient have been utilized as a medium for expression and association in art therapy and as one method of communication in psychotherapy.

The exhibit presents the patient's responses in art therapy to the following changes in the life of the psychotherapist: his engagement, marriage and departure from the hospital. Relevant data are included under the categories of the Art Therapy Situation; Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist; Associations by the patient to the pictures; and Comments. Associations are drawn both from the art therapy and psychotherapy sessions into which the paintings were introduced by the patient. Recordings were made for all psychotherapy sessions during the four year period. Most of the quoted portions are from these recorded transcriptions. The comments are the combined effort of the art therapist and psychotherapist. Ancillary data from the ward, social worker, clinical and research psychologists etc., were available in formulating these comments.

* Since the completion of this study, 1959, the patient has been discharged and is residing in a community at some distance from other members of her family.

III. Scope:

13 pictures (pastels, tempera and oils) have been selected from among 30 productions during a period of 8 months of bi-weekly art therapy sessions which coincided with sessions (four times per week) in the fourth year of psychotherapy.

IV. Introduction to Viewing the Paintings:

The use of the color *yellow* merits special attention. According to family history, the patient and her siblings were noted to have color preferences in childhood. The choice of colors in clothes etc. not only continued in adolescence, but became the prerogative of the patient (her three sisters having similar prerogatives).

A number of formulations and color and form symbols merit special considerations. The formulation of the concept of *self-realization* is based upon relevant associations by the patient in viewing the pictures. *Self-presentation* is usually depicted as beige; *ego-ideal* as yellow; *hostility* as red; *envy* as green; *intellectual understanding* of emotions, usually with an underlying depression, as blue; *depression* as dark blue and purple; *agitated depression* and *confusion* as brown and black.

The theme of fantasy-solution to conflict (especially via the relationship to the therapist) is often depicted in representations of sailing and also in symbols of *flight* (wings of bird, etc.); a number of representations are easily recognizable: the "fire" of hostility, the "aggressive" arrow, the "whirlpools" of feeling, the "whirlpool" of depression, the "shelter" of psychosis, etc. Major private symbols, more referable to the patient, are noted in the associations or/and comments.

V. Summary:

In the pictures, there may be observed the patient's response to life-changes of the psychotherapist.

The *control period* (i.e., prior to the patient's awareness of these changes) provides psychologically and artistically immature, rigid and constricted paintings with representations of self, focal conflicts (e.g., oedipal situation, the need to please, etc.) and "solutions" in the form of escape fantasies.

Following the critical announcement of the life-changes (engagement and marriage) of the psychotherapist, there is a *crisis period* in which a shift in "control" was seen to emerge in art therapy. Representations of self, "ego ideal," and controlled expressions are replaced by abstract paintings of uncontrolled outbursts of feelings (envy, anger, depression, etc.) which include only feeble attempts at intellectual control. Within this period, "denial" is also pictured. The creativeness and the artistic value of the patient's painting will be seen to be increased by the release noted.

In the *post-crisis period*, there is a return to more organized representational painting, in which symbols are of a less private nature. This last period also reveals the artistic fusion of direct release and a self-imposed control. This fusion may be seen to have its counterpart in increased freedom of communication in psychotherapy as well as in the return of certain mechanisms of defense, which as yet have not miscarried. The imminent departure of the psychotherapist leads into a *second crisis period* in which the patient's all pervading hostility emerges. Here the gamut of feelings are not reckoned in terms of such clinical states as depression etc., but rather in terms of the profound alternatives of a painful reality or a psychotic shelter.

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Picture Number 1: SUNSHINE

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

None.

Art Therapy Situations:

Art therapy is begun as an additional technique for self-expression. No direction as to subject is given.

Medium: Pastels (selected by art therapist), considered a desirably simple introductory medium.

Technique: The theme of the painting is quickly chosen by the patient. There is much indecision in the choice of colors. Lines are redrawn obsessively.

Reaction: Over-all anxiety; recognition of the possibility of self-expression.

Associations:

"Regardless of what I do in the way of drawing, this is the kind of thing I draw right off. The yellow represents feeling happy"

Comments:

The sketch of the yellow daisy is interpreted as a self-presentation in an artistically and psychologically immature manner. The utilization of *yellow* as a representation of the *ego-ideal*, may be regarded as an important *response-variable* — in terms of its presence, absence, area, intensity, etc., what happens to it is a major motif in the sequence of paintings.



Picture No. 1
Exhibit I

A - yellow

B - green

C - blue

Picture Number 3: SAIL AWAY

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

None.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: Three.

Medium: Pastels.

Technique: Theme chosen prior to session. Although re-drawing and erasing present, patient is more organized and goal-oriented.

Reaction: Decreased anxiety, more assertive.

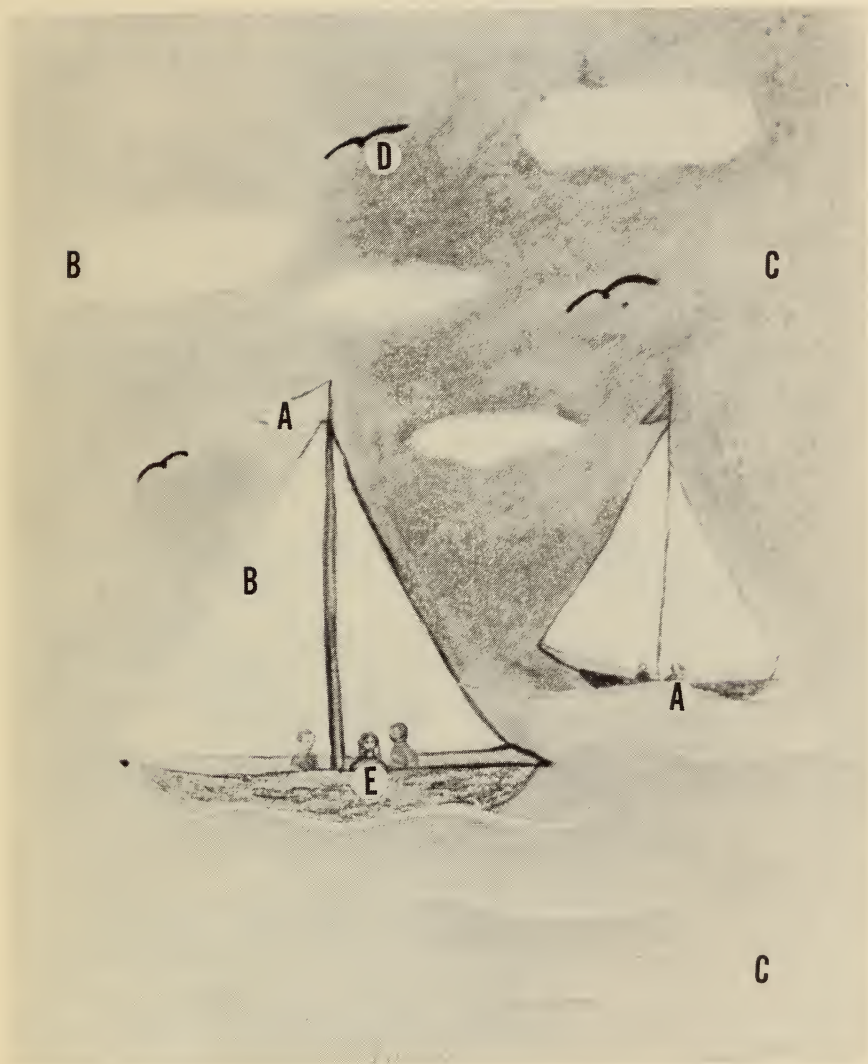
Associations:

To boat with three occupants: "A man, a woman and a child, perhaps my sister — she was father's favorite."

To boat with two occupants: "A man and a woman ... All through my life I've wanted to put myself over here regardless; I put people in a parent relationship; I was having fantasies about you; I wish my mother could see it."

Comments:

The *oedipal-conflict* and the *sibling-rivalry* are represented; the fantasied "solution" (reparative mechanism) is pictured in sailing away with the *parent-therapist* (i.e., marriage to the therapist with displacement of patient-rivals.) The motif of "sailing away" will be variously represented in other paintings.



Picture No. 3
Exhibit II

A - yellow
B - white

C - blue-gray
D - black

E - red

Picture Number 8: A PAINTER'S DELIGHT

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

None.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: Five.

Medium: Pastels. Associations to shapes appearing in quick "scribbles" were used as the starting point for the theme of the picture. This technique was introduced to facilitate more spontaneous responses in art therapy.

Approach: Perfectionistic. Nevertheless, although still rigid and stereotypic in expression, she draws more spontaneously.

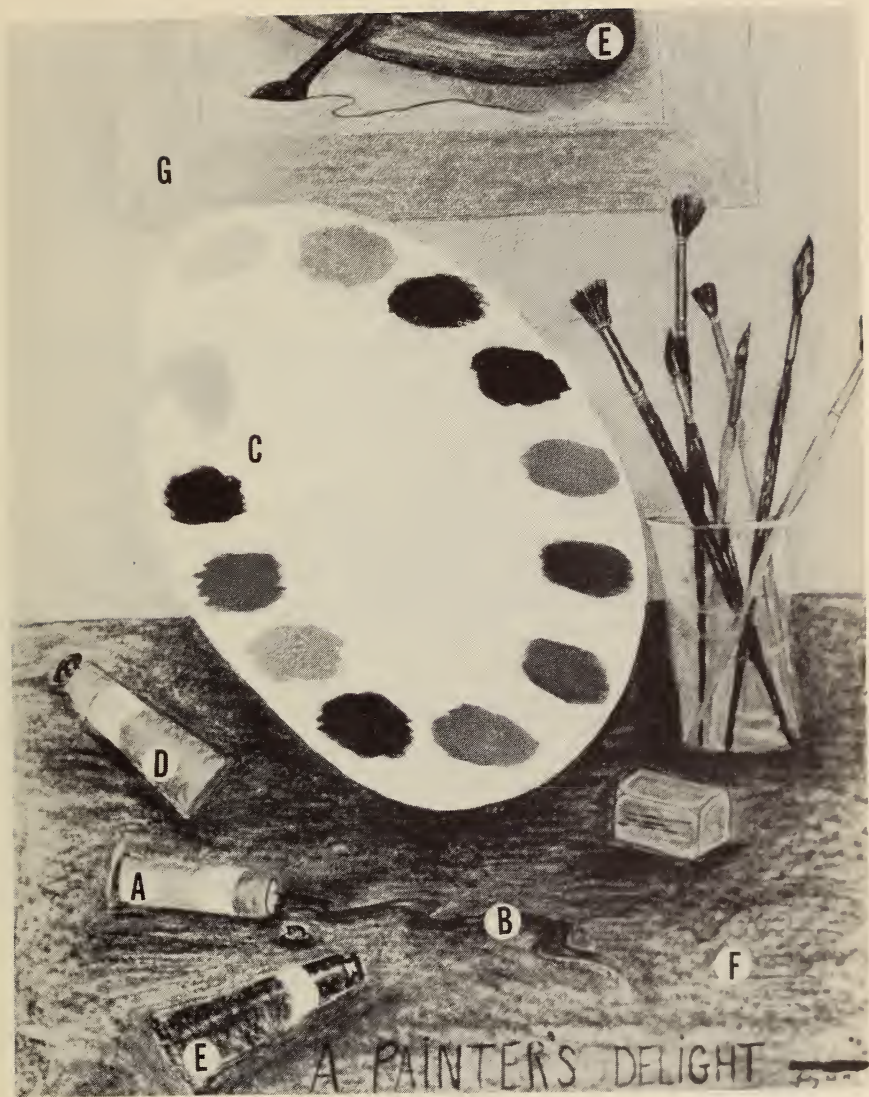
Reaction: Less overt anxiety; increased expression of the need to please.

Associations:

The patient associates the production of this painting with performance at home — "Everything had to be just perfect." Re art therapist: "I felt I was pleasing her quite a bit" (e.g., choice of subject, etc.) ... "but this picture actually hasn't any feeling in it ... it was like getting in the boat and escaping, sailing away. I wasn't there."

Comments:

Transference feelings emerge in relationship to the art therapist; as with her mother, the patient desperately seeks to please. *Obsessive* (e.g., perfectionism) defenses are utilized, but are insufficient. Again, there is near dissolution of *self-presentation*; although a boat is pictured, the occupants are not. There are *introjection* fantasies of mother, transference figures; in addition to feelings of being controlled, there are grandiose feelings re ability to control mother, therapists. The theme of sailing away, the escape through fantasy, in this case via the relationship with therapist, repeats itself.



Picture No. 8
Exhibit III

A - yellow

C - white

E - brown

G - aqua

B - red

D - blue

F - grey

All colors on palette

Picture Number 10: REPRESSED HOSTILITY BLUES

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

Engagement of psychotherapist known to patient prior to art therapy session.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera paints offered as means of bypassing constricting effect of obsessive preliminary drawings.

Approach: Although patient encounters difficulty in technique (running of paint, etc.), she represents feelings more directly.

Reaction: There is increased involvement in this production, which is executed in silence. She reserves associations for sessions with psychotherapist. However, patient does indicate that father had died about this date, the previous year.

Associations:

"I was so upset (re engagement) ... and this is how it came out ... the dark colors represent my real feeling ... the dark blue, the blues ... the running paint, my tears ... the red is hostility ... the lighter blue, a more positive way of trying to think and accept, ... my intellectual thinking ... this fades beyond that into the beige, pushing aside all feelings that I really felt and feeling I'd feel nothing and everything (the beige equated with subdued exterior appearance presented to others) ... and the yellow is looking way ahead as to what I might be later or accept, the way I wanted to be in this picture."

Comments:

The patient associates the engagement of the therapist with the death of her father. She attempts to be "logical," but *repressive defenses* are insufficient. Anger and depression are evident in the picture. Nevertheless the patient is still able to present the brittle, "beige" exterior to her environs. Representations of *Self* and *ego-ideal* goal of mature acceptance are still retained.



Picture No. 10
Exhibit IV

- A - dark blue
- B - red
- C - light blue
- D - beige
- E - yellow

Picture Number 13: HOSTILITY

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

In a variety of situations, there continue to be communications to the patient re the engagement of the therapist.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Oils. Since expression in tempera seemed inhibited by the necessity of waiting for the paint to dry, oils were introduced.

Approach: The patient paints in an immediate, uncomplicated fashion.

Reaction: There is eagerness to utilize the "painting-communication" in psychotherapy.

Associations:

"A bonfire ... the sparks represent hostility itself ... I could not tell anyone or say it ... the only thing I could do was either paint it or write it ... The black represents the blackness of it all ... the grey, the doomed feeling ... the green, the envy ... and the lighter portion, trying to make myself appear on top of everything ... what I had in mind too when I painted the sky, handling the feeling to the point that I don't have the feeling, I wasn't supposed to feel ... "

Comments:

Out of the welter of feelings, and with *repression* and *suppression* increasingly ineffective, there crystallizes out the patient's *hostility*. Communication at first consists of representing the emotion in letter or picture; after such "indirect" introduction in psychotherapy there occurs, following associations, the direct (but muted) expression of hostility.



Picture No. 13
Exhibit V

- A - black
- B - dark grey
- C - green
- D - beige
- E - red

Picture Number 14: RAINBOW GAITY

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

There is decreased comment with subsequent decreased communication to the patient re the engagement of the therapist. The therapist is on leave from the hospital.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera. Patient indicates increased comfort in medium of her choice, tempera.

Approach: The patient creates the rainbow effect without hesitation. There is some preoccupation with blending of colors.

Reaction: No overt reaction. Patient notes that two rainbows do not cross, but decides not to alter this.

Associations:

"I was feeling relief ... glad in a way (that you left) because I was feeling that my emotion or your happiness (would have made me) an emotional wreck. I wanted to be this wonderful sport and hide all of what I really felt ... "

"The shape (resulting from the fact the rainbows do not cross) represents a bird winging off into some direction. Of course this bird didn't know quite where she was going ... "

Comments:

As time passes, there is increasing *denial* of the reality of the engagement of the therapist; there is relief in not being confronted by his presence. Other associations indicate the return at this time of the patient's feeling able to control the therapist's life (i.e. preventing his marriage), utilizing the idea that he continues to be engaged and *not* married.¹ The form of the bird,² similarly pictured in the painting SAIL AWAY emphasises the anxiety and confusion of her flight from the reality at hand.

¹ Still, within the colors of the rainbow are to be found the representations of the emotions, previously noted. (Note Yellow).

² (to be found in the uncrossed rainbows.)



Picture No. 14
Exhibit VI

A - light blue
Rainbow multi-
colored

Picture Number 15: A WHIRLPOOL OF FEELING

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

Announcement of the marriage of the therapist has been communicated to the patient.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: The picture is begun with the purple-blue "whirl".

Reaction: Patient communicates more directly to the art therapist her feelings re psychotherapist and the expression of such feelings in the art medium.

She indicates that one aspect of her attempt to adapt is to "paint it (the feelings) out."

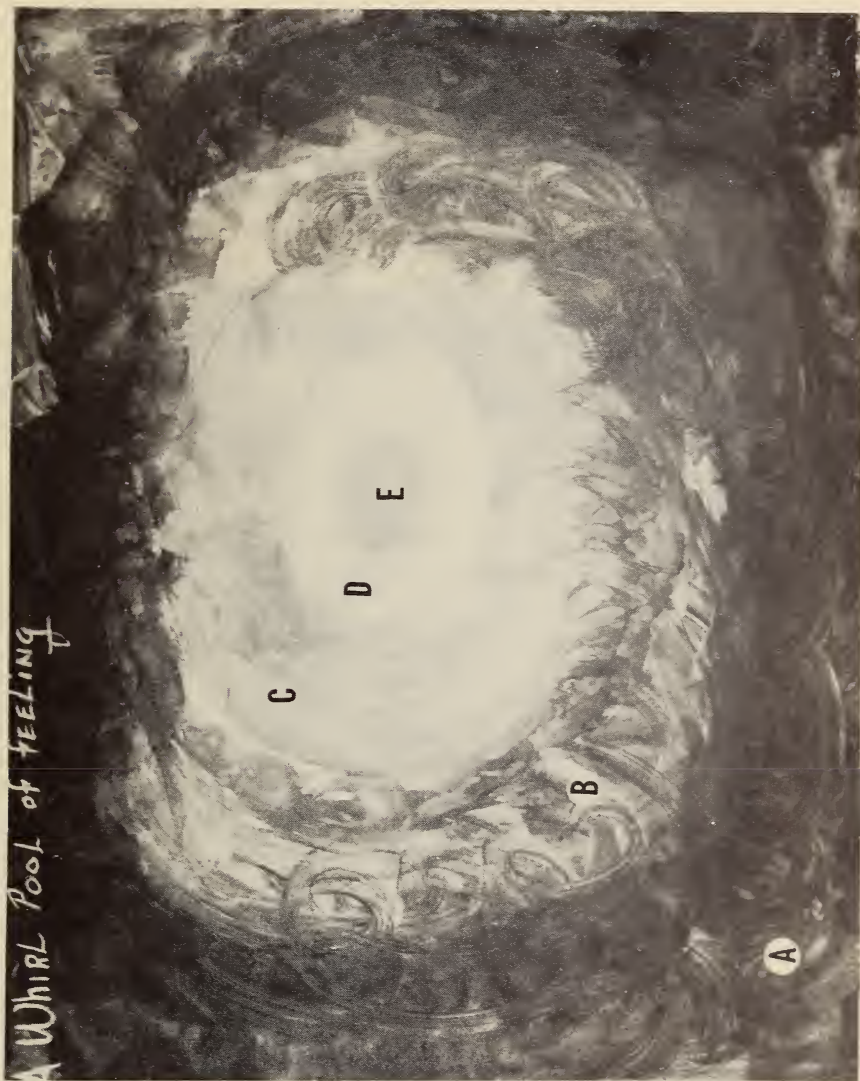
Associations:

"I don't know what I do, I don't know what I feel, (but) when I do this I can see how (the feelings) change." "The brown is the turmoil, this green represents the envy and jealousy toward your wife —but right behind all this (the guilt) ... the blue is the blueness of it ... the yellow is the way I try to handle it, but when I do this the center becomes dim ... when I figure myself out, there will be more of it. The inside is dim ... I feel alone."

Comments:

The patient feels "blue," recognizing that she is utilizing her intellect with decreasing effectiveness, with only a beige exterior (self-presentation) separating her from the whirlpool of feelings. The patient finds it difficult to picture the *ego-ideal*; she feels alone and deserted.

Clinically, the patient is somewhat depressed but the pre-dominant picture is one of confusion.



Picture No. 15
Exhibit VII

- A - brown
- B - green
- C - blue
- D - "yellow" (beige)
- E - "dim"

Picture Number 21: DEPRESSION

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

The psychotherapist has returned to the hospital.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: The patient paints quickly, without stopping and in silence.

Reaction: The patient indicates an urgent need to picture her feelings. Her manner is manic and grandiose. She states: "I am in my glory."

Associations:

"Everything was going round and round ... red and black (the depth of the depression) mixed around, ... red, the hostility, ... green, the envy ... and the blueness ... all go into the whirlpool in the center."

(There is no yellow and no beige) "because I painted exactly what I felt ... unconcerned ... tired of trying to be positive. I noticed this (absence of yellow and beige) and I thought will I feel guilty about not holding some of this positive (yellow), or this outside (beige) that I'm supposed to have or this no-feeling-at-all or be able to handle my feelings. It was relief (to paint what I felt) ... although after a while I began to feel guilty again ... it has been drilled into me so long that I'm not supposed to feel anything."

Comments:

The patient is clinically depressed, crying frequently and in general communicating her feelings directly during the psychotherapy sessions. Such overt expression (i.e. in addition to graphic or/and written communication) is infrequent. There is a sense of relief and with it a momentary sense of the concept of self-realization but this is offset by the return of obsessive (*super-ego*) ideation re exhibiting affect appropriate to her underlying feelings.

There is a feeling of "self-realization" in the elimination of the representation of the self-presentation and ego-ideal from the picture. While ego boundaries remain blurred, she is able to distinguish a separateness from parental identity.

The depression not only is part of the transference reaction but becomes the self-confrontation of transference. Analysis of the transference is thus aided at this point in the treatment process.



Picture No. 21 Exhibit VIII A - mixture of red and black; B - green; C - blue

Picture Number 24: ATMOSPHERIC CAVERON (misspelled)

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

None. The "atmosphere" of the ward on which the patient resides, is especially tense.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: The picture is painted quickly, compulsively.

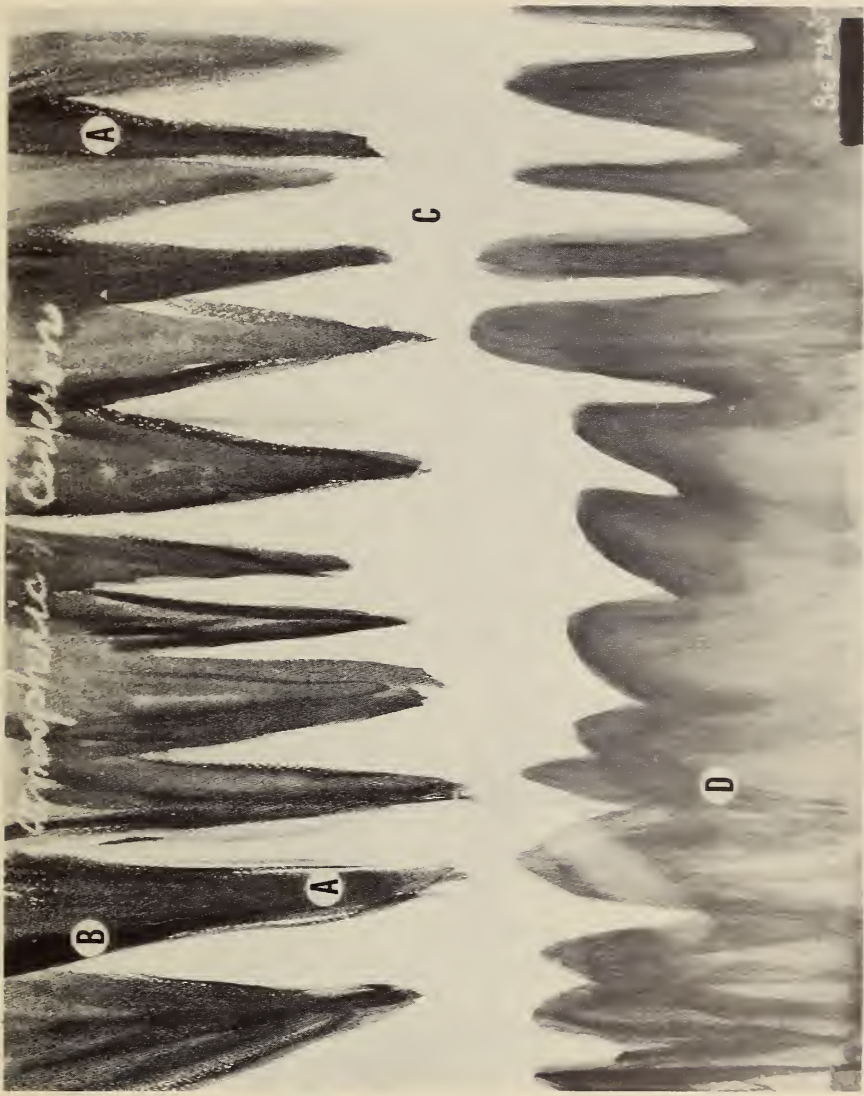
Reaction: Patient indicates that this picture is her communication, painted rather than written as has been the case at other times. A third person quality is reintroduced (i.e. there is "distance") as for example in her remark "When my feelings are here on paper, they don't seem so difficult."

Associations:

"The purple and black above represent the environment (in which) I have been living ... the light part is more or less representing me, leading into the more dark, which represents problems with me. My problems are not so peaked (as the environment) because I was trying to handle (i.e. please) the environment to the point that I kind of forgot what I was feeling."

Comments:

There is the increasing return of obsessive-compulsive *defenses*. Whatever her own "person-problems" are, she sees herself molded by and almost a reflection of, her environment at any given time. Thus she deals primarily with *self-presentation*, with no representation of ego-ideal and no conceptualization of self-realization.



Picture No. 24
Exhibit IX

- A - purple
- B - black
- C - beige
- D - blue green

Picture Number 25: NO NAME (AUTUMN SCENE)

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

None. There is little environmental feed-back on marriage of psychotherapist, and as yet, little emphasis on departure of psychotherapist.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: Five.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: There is difficulty in formulating an "over-all" approach; the individual sectors receive more consideration. However, patient does not concentrate as much on minute details.

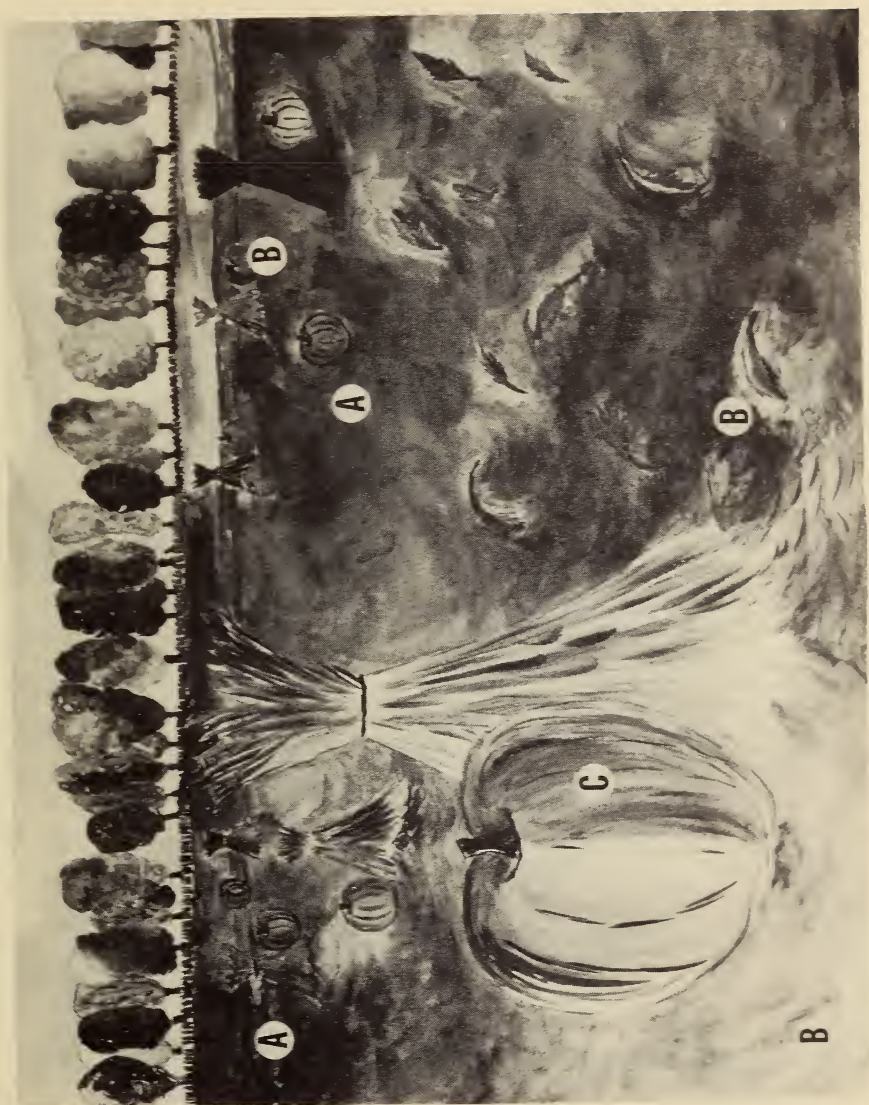
Reaction: Her reaction varies with the portion of the painting. For example, in the "spontaneous" expression in the area of the twirling leaves, there is greater interaction with the art therapist than in the more orderly background of trees.

Associations:

"This might represent in a way what I'm trying to be myself—I know in some respect what I'm trying to be or what I want to be but what's going on within me and what happens around me—and all this fantasy and difficulty—has me pulled back more. I—I think I'm in better position to decide what I want to be after finding out what I did in the past."

Comments:

The picture, an artistically more creative production, reveals disciplined spontaneity. Color associations are similar: e.g. brown—depression; green—envy, etc. Clinically, the patient is symptomatically improved. Obsessive defenses are present but do not impair her ability to analyze the spontaneous productions relating to her fantasies. The picture, e.g. in rows of trees, reflects obsessive-compulsive features, but in addition, e.g. the twirling leaves, reveals the spontaneity of expression and feeling, which at its height had been represented in a "whirlpool of feeling" and clinical confusion.



Picture No. 25
Exhibit X

- A - brown
- B - green
- C - orange
- Trees - bright
multicolor

Picture Number 26: BE THANKFUL YOU'RE ALIVE — THE
AXE WILL SOON GET ME

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

Announcement of December 1, 1958 as specific date of departure of the psychotherapist.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: Five.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: The patient paints the feathers of the turkey easily, apparently utilizing plumage colors to express herself. However she is impatient re details of background etc.

Reaction: As noted, her reaction varies according to area under consideration. She indicates her hypersensitivity at this time as well as her need to handle events intellectually and to "talk turkey."

Associations

"I am way ahead of season ... my therapist is leaving ... I will not have another ... I might be leaving here."

Comments:

The sombre stillness of the picture emphasizes a clinical "calm" preceding more acute reactions to the departure of the therapist. A gamut of feelings previously represented, is here to be found in the treatment of the vari-colored plumage. The row of trees, the ordered pickets of the fence very likely reflect *obsessive-compulsive defenses* against her anxiety. The clinical *denial* of her reaction is reflected in the subtitle of her picture: "Shall we talk about something else?"



Picture No. 26
Exhibit XI

A - dull brown-green
B - combination of sombre purples, greens, browns
Trees - same as B

Picture Number 28: HOSTILITY

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

- Increased attention to details relating to departure of psychotherapist.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: The red arrows are painted after diagonally painted blue and gray lines.

Reaction: Patient expresses relief, after seeking out permission to interrupt previous painting. This sequence is repeated in red arrows "which don't have a very nice meaning."

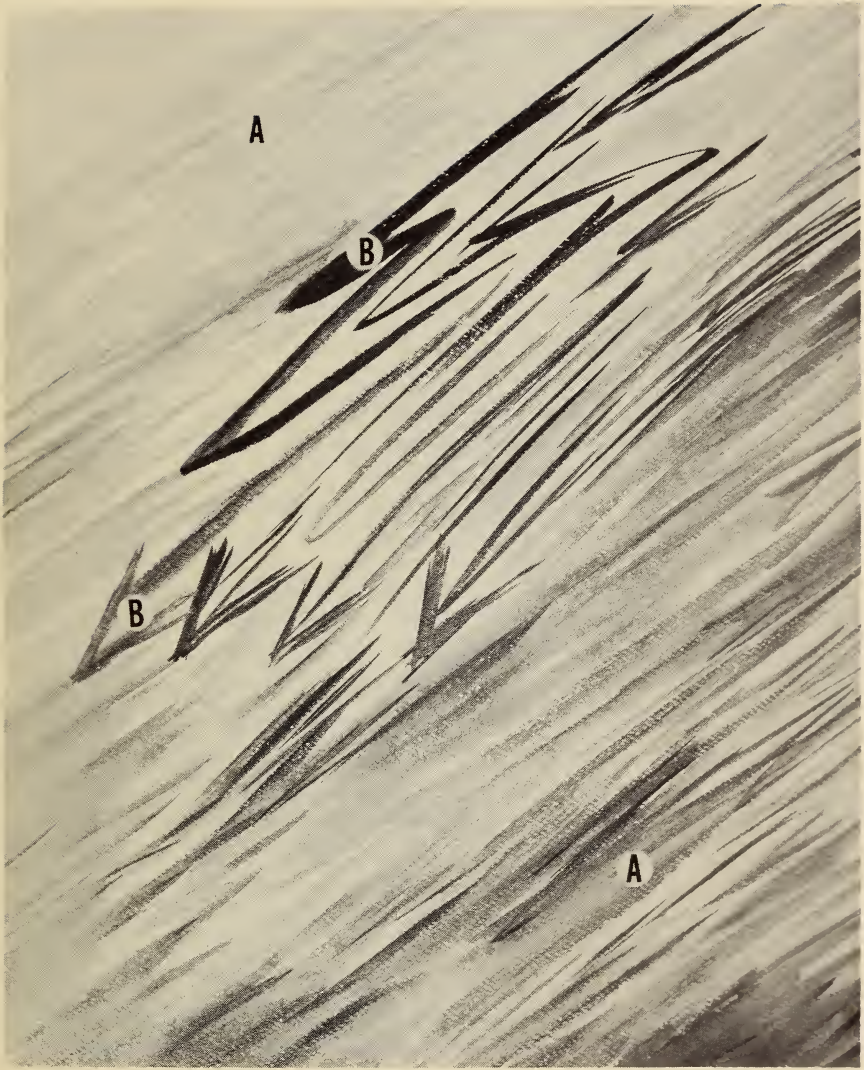
Associations:

"The (hostile) red arrows aren't very nice ... (at home) everything could only be nice. The blue and gray are my depressed feelings."

Comment:

A "core-hostility" emerges clinically: it is pervasive and "world-enveloping." It seems related to her inability to control the world around her (the activities of the therapist being but one example). She indicates how her humiliation in being unable to do so and the retroflexion of her anger contribute to the depression. She vacillates between grandiose beliefs in her ability to control and the anger, humility and depression of being unable to do so.

The freedom to express this hostility is contrasted with the rigid control exerted in the home. She underscores a (? temporary) recognition of the possibility of meaningful differences in categories of people and environment, —e.g. her home, art therapy and psychotherapy, the ward, etc.



Picture No. 28
Exhibit XII

A - blues and grays

B - red

Picture Number 31: MY SHELL-TER AGAINST APPROACHING ANXIETY

Changes in the Life of the Psychotherapist:

Announcement of dates of last session and departure of psychotherapist.

Art Therapy Situation:

Number of sessions: One.

Medium: Tempera.

Approach: The patient sketches an oval shape in the center of the composition; following this she uses the art therapist's shell pin as a model.

Reaction: The patient works urgently and in silence.

Associations:

(Re shell and colors around it): "Unfortunately this is the way I — where I feel I'm — emotionally this is the way I feel — actually I'm inside this or going inside it with all of this."

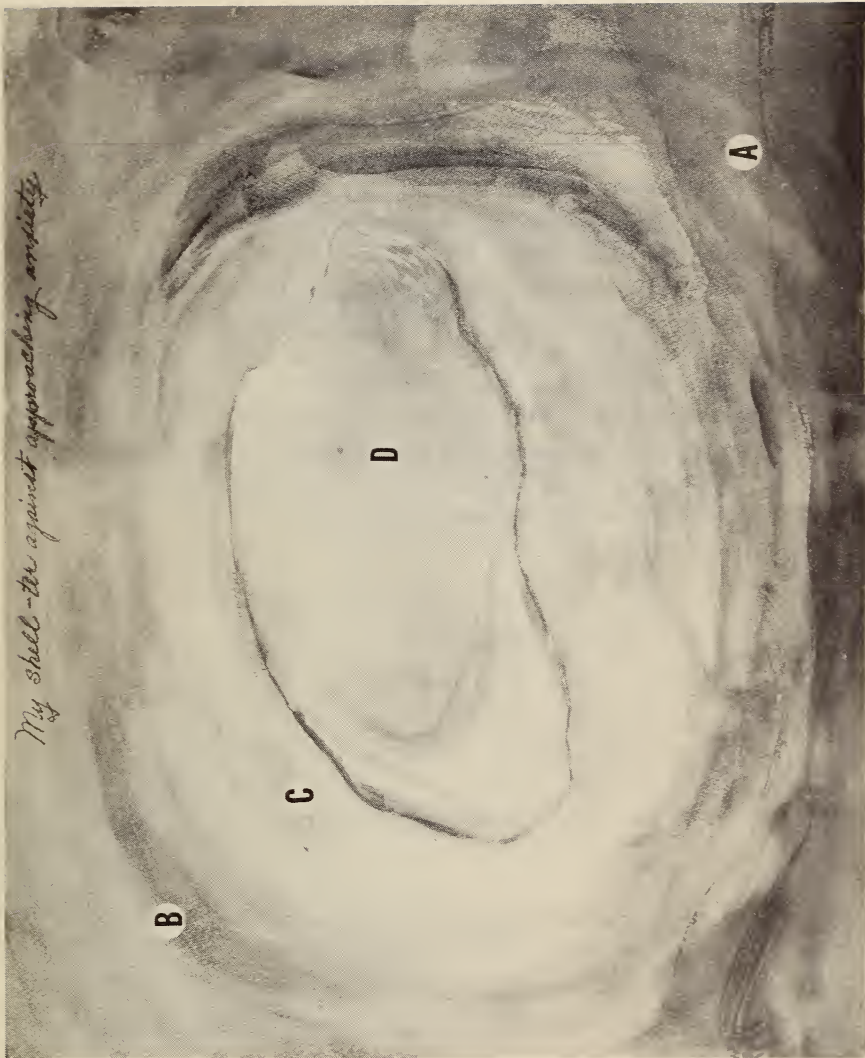
"It's just if I can get over or hurdle this (conflict re fantasy) well enough to stay out of this shell effect ... what bothers me is this business of power ... I wonder if I have any power ... if I'm supposed to have any power."

"I keep telling myself ... I can handle it within myself. I will come out all right but what is underneath and what I'm feeling (re the psychotherapist) ... someday I can accept more than now ..."

"Your reassuring me that you *are* my side ... this is an encouraging feeling since I am still so annoyed and saddened by the disillusionment ... it may have taken some disillusionment to help me separate fantasy from reality ... this is the hardest to handle ... unless I can get this straightened out, despair sets in — everything becomes meaningless and a (schizophrenic) reaction is in sight."

Comment:

The patient sees the alternatives available primarily in terms of a schizophrenic reaction which permits fantasies re psychotherapist. There has occurred an experience in



Picture No. 31
Exhibit XIII

All subdued pastel
colors:

- A - blue
- B - pink-grey
- C - pale green
- D - grey & white

"relationship," in which the identities of the individuals have been felt at various times as fused, "over-lapping" and separate (if only temporarily). The transference feelings which emerged, continue to be handled for the most part in an intellectual manner; emotional insight and adaptability are seen by the patient as potentially inadequate at this stressful point in the life-situation.

Although the patient recognizes the potential for a self-realization, she concerns herself with her alternative pictures of psychosis and "reality." "Reality" is visualized as the giving up of power and fantasy and finding in their place disillusionment, helplessness and aloneness. On the other hand, the patient underscores the advantages of a regression (psychosis) which permits the resurgence of feelings of power and unlimited fantasy regarding the psychotherapist and the world around her.

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